

National Research Council of Italy
Institute for Marine and Coastal Environment (IAMC-CNR)
Detached Unit of Capo Granitola



***International scientific training as a tool of science
cooperation. The "DIPLOMAzia" Programme at the
IAMC-CNR.***

Project report.

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Abstract: a Multi-Disciplinary Education Programme called 'DIPLOMAzia', is the result of a Convention signed between the National Research Council and the General Director for the Italian Cooperation for Development (DGCS) of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE). The Programme comprised a "*Governance and management of marine and fisheries policies*" (Course 1) section, implemented by the Institute for Marine and Coastal Environment of the National Research Council of Italy (IAMC-CNR) and aimed at training 15 young graduates from North African and Balkan Region in marine sciences-related issues. The initiative, as a genuine pilot-project in this field, provided the trainees a unique experience giving them the opportunity to work and have an in-depth knowledge of IAMC's expertise in oceanography and marine sciences, but also enabled the Institute and its staff to gain more experience in carrying out international training courses.

This project report, after describing the course, its origin, extent, goals, aims at highlighting the role played by scientific cooperation with emerging economies, providing "good practices" and valuable experience for better tuning similar initiatives in the future, as well as enhancing the role of the Italian scientific research system abroad.

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Introduction

The IAMC-CNR - Detached Unit of Capo Granitola - is placed along the South-Western Sicilian coast and it is hosted by a m² 10,000 restructured tuna-farming. The Detached Unit of Capo Granitola develops marine-related research activities on the relations between the physical, chemical, biological and geological parameters at sea. The research groups led interdisciplinary national and international projects aimed at studying the functioning of marine ecosystems for the rational and sustainable exploitation of resources.

The most representative research areas at Capo Granitola rest on the four key scientific roots of physics, biology, chemistry and geology.

- Hydro-acoustic and Marine Bioacoustics;
- Biotechnologies and Molecular Biology;
- Biological Oceanography;
- Chemical Oceanography and Geochemistry.

Relating to scientific services delivery and technological transfer, the skills of Capo Granitola's IAMC should be seen as a driving force likely to produce a new momentum on the local economy through innovation. In fact, the research groups' vision aims at promoting socio-economic development. The main tool is the participation in EU-funded projects (mainly Structural Funds, but also EC Horizon 2020) in partnership with other research institutes, local enterprises and stakeholders, as well as research spin-offs and start-ups.

On the basis of the above-mentioned research lines, the Institute's mission can be described as follows:

- Providing scientific support to regional policies for the protection of marine ecosystems and sustainably exploiting their potential;
- Strengthening the “triple propeller” (Research, Innovation, Training) within the territory;
- Contribute to make regional and national research system more competitive compared to the European level;
- Contribute to strengthen the existing technological production chains and create new ones;
- Strengthening international scientific cooperation.

From an international point of view, strengthening international scientific cooperation is also a priority for the Detached Unit that provides its contribution to the Euro-Mediterranean cohesion policy, in terms of sustainable development and “knowledge economy”: the tools are co-operation agreements with several institutions, from European, Mediterranean, North-African and Latin America countries, as well as research and training projects in partnership with emerging economies. As a result, foreign young researchers, or graduated professionals and officials in public institutions are increasingly attracted by the IAMC of Capo Granitola. Similarly to the Italian researchers, foreigners are recruited on the basis of specific projects, mainly international scientific cooperation programmes. In recent years, groups of newly graduated students from France, Argentina, Germany, Libya (on-going), Mexico, Russia, Spain (on-going) and Vietnam have researched at the Institute between 2010 and 2014, under the aegis of international mobility programs or on the basis of *ad hoc* initiatives.

DIPLOMAzia Programme: an overview



Direzione Generale - Ufficio Relazioni Europee e Internazionali
Relazioni Internazionali



Cooperazione Italiana
allo Sviluppo
Ministero degli Affari Esteri

"Scienze per la DIPLOMAzia"
Multi-disciplinary Training Programme
(CUP: B56J13000320006)

Within the above described context, in 2014, IAMC-CNR was involved as a recipient CNR Institute for the Programme called "Sciences for DIPLOMAzia" ("DIPLOMAzia").

DIPLOMAzia was the result of a long and close cooperation carried out between the National Research Council of Italy (CNR) and the General Director for the Italian Cooperation for Development of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs MAE (DGCS-MAE). It was conceived as a new international policy-making instrument aiming at strengthening dialogue and cooperation among countries through science and research.

This kind of "diplomatic initiative" consisted of 70 fellowships to be awarded to young graduates and public officers from North African, Middle Eastern and Balkan Region countries who were able to benefit from training courses held at the CNR Institutes participating to the initiative, lasting 6 months, in the following disciplines:

- *Governance and management of marine and fisheries policies (Course 1);*
- *Management and usage of agrifood resources with the aim of fostering sustainable agriculture and forestry as well as reduction of the effects of climate changes (Course 2);*
- *Governance of knowledge, and management, conservation, valorisation and sustainable fruition of cultural heritage (Course 3).*

The disciplines were selected by the CNR and the DGCS-MAE in order to focus on some national Science & Technologies priorities both for Italy and the international partner countries: following these criteria, the involved CNR structures provided a high-profile professional training in the selected macro-areas, encouraged and supported the placement of such professionals in management and entrepreneurial positions in their countries of origin.

However, the final aim of DIPLOMAzia was not only the training of experts in the various sectors, who would then enter the socio-economical and productive milieu of their countries of origin, but also that of supporting the enhancement of an institutional 'capacity building' activity

which is necessary to the process of endogenous development of 'ownership' in the countries involved, further increasing the future scientific, technological and innovation cooperation projects with Italy.

Similarly, the selection of countries followed a "national interest" criterion, mainly in terms of business investment. The Pan-Mediterranean approach was a milestone set by the DGCS-MAE which focused on 8 Countries:



Albania



Bosnia and Herzegovina



Egypt



Lebanon



Montenegro



Morocco



Serbia



Tunisia

These countries' geographical proximity to Italy made it strategically important to favour and strengthen mutual relations of cooperation in order to achieve sustainable growth and stability in the area as a whole.

As a result, application was open to all and limited to graduates and graduated administrators citizens and residents of the above mentioned countries.

Further requirements comprised:

- University degree as specified below for each Course:
 - Course 1: Environmental Sciences, Natural Sciences, Life Sciences, Chemistry, Geology, Environmental Engineering.
 - Course 2: Agricultural Sciences, Forestry, Animal Production Sciences, Food Production Sciences, Veterinary Sciences, Life Sciences, Natural Sciences, Biotechnology, Environmental Sciences.
 - Course 3: Physics, Geology, Chemistry, Cultural Heritage Preservation Sciences, Architecture (with specialization in Restoration Sciences, History of Urban Planning), Archaeology, Ancient Sciences, Literary Philological and historical-artistic, Historic Sciences.
- Date of birth not earlier than 1973.

- Very good knowledge of the English language, with official certifications considered as an asset.

As for fellows' benefits, the selected candidates received logistical support and assistance at their arrival and throughout their stay in Italy.

The gross monthly sum of EUROS 1,600 was provided each month to cover accommodation and living expenses as well as public transportation and other little expenses.

Insurance was provided against any injuries, as well as National Health Insurance coverage.

All travel costs to and from Italy were also covered by the Programme.

Course 1: Selection and Kick-off



As previously mentioned, the IAMC-CNR developed over the past years valuable experience in organizing post-degree training courses in marine sciences, proving both theoretical knowledge and technical experience "in the field", within the Institute's laboratories or on board oceanographic cruises.

However, implementing an international training course addressed to foreign students implied a different approach: cross-cutting disciplines such as marine spatial planning, geographical political economy, maritime law were also comprised in the training path in order to provide a more comprehensive training offer. Moreover, some topics such as European RTD policies, Euro project and Project Management were also included with the aim of bringing the students closer to the European Research Area, helping them to exploit the opportunities given by European research framework programmes (e.g. Horizon 2020, Life + Programme, etc.).

As for the Course 1, the selection procedure took place in March 2014.

28 fellowships had to be awarded, out of more than 50 applications received. By agreement among the involved CNR Structures, the selection criteria were:

SELECTION CRITERIA
EDUCATION (<i>Master Degree, PhD, Post Graduate Courses</i>) (Max 6)
WORKING/MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE (Max 8)
PUBLICATIONS (<i>Book or chapters of book, Papers, Proceedings and other</i>) (Max 8)
SKILLS AND COMPETENCES (<i>Languages, Computer skills, Add. Information</i>) (Max 4)
LETTER OF REFERENCE (Max 4)

Table 1

The threshold was set at 18 scores out of 30, while an evaluation commission was appointed for each Course and made up of three researchers. The whole selection procedure was on-line, in order to enable the CNR Structures located in different parts of Italy to proceed easily.

Applications revealed that candidates' profiles and experiences were quite miscellaneous, ranging from more experienced candidates with a sound scientific basis including professional experiences abroad, and younger students without any specialization after graduation.

Concerning the geographical distribution of the applications, the great majority of candidates was from Egypt, the country with the highest population by far. This determined a bias with national quotas set by the DGCS-MAE: albeit not compulsory, these quotas were indicative but it was hard to take them into account.

Table 2 shows Course 1 scenario after the selection procedure:

#	COUNTRY	APPLICATIONS RECEIVED	APPLICATIONS SELECTED
1	ALBANIA	3	2
2	BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	0	0
3	EGYPT	33	18
4	LEBANON	0	0
5	MONTENEGRO	3	1
6	MOROCCO	1	1
7	SERBIA	5	2
8	TUNISIA	8	4
TOT.		53	28

Table 2

No application arrived from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Lebanon.

By April 15th, the list of the selected scholarship winners was published on the official CNR Website. Each of the selected candidates received the official letter of communication of scholarship awarding, containing all the necessary information and relevant terms and conditions. As for Course 1, against all expectations, only the 57% of the selected winners accepted to attend the course. Reasons for refusal were different: some selected winners claimed personal or family reasons or they said they were unavailable to move to Italy for 6 months. It is important to highlight that many foreign students were motivated and they showed to be able to choose within a wide research and career opportunity portfolio from abroad, as many of them claimed that they had been awarded at the same time fellowships from other industrialized countries (e.g. Germany or Japan) and they were consequently choosing different destinations. Another reason explaining refusals could be the fellowship amount that many candidates deemed as too low.

As result, Course 1 actual participants are represented in Table 3:

#	SURNAME and Name	SEX	COUNTRY
1	SHALTOUT Mohamed	M	EGY
2	BAKIU Rigers	M	ALB
3	IBRAHEM Wael	M	EGY
4	ABOUELFALDL Khaled	M	EGY
5	ABD-ELAAL Ali	M	EGY
6	KECI Erjola	F	ALB
7	ALY Walid	M	EGY
8	AHMED Mohamed	M	EGY
9	AHMED Ayman	M	EGY
10	HOUSSAM Tachicart	M	MOR
11	REDA Rasha	F	EGY
12	DUROVIC Mirjana	F	SER
13	HASSAAN Mohamed	M	EGY
14	ABDEL TAWAB Marwa	F	EGY
15	EL-ADAWY Ahmed	M	EGY
16	GHONIMY Abdallah	M	EGY

Table 3

Due to the early repatriation of an Egyptian candidate for family reasons, the last number of Course 1 participants was 15 and the represented countries were only 5.

DIPLOMAzia at a glance

Project name: Multi-disciplinary Training Programme “Scienze per la Diplomazia - DIPLOMAzia” (CUP: B56J13000320006)

Funding agency: MAE-DGCS - Framework Agreement between CNR e MAE-DGCS (Prot. CNR 0068091 - 12th November, 2013)

CNR involved Structures:

- Office for International Relations and Activities (UARI)
- Institute for Marine and Coastal Environment (IAMC)
- Institute of Archaeological Heritage, Monuments and Sites (IBAM)
- Institute of Biosciences and Bio-resources (IBBR)
- Institute for Ancient Mediterranean Studies (ISMA)
- Institute for Technologies Applied to Cultural Heritage (ITABC)
- Institute for the Conservation and Promotion of Cultural Heritage (ICVBC)

Project duration: 12 months (January 2014 - January 2015)

Total cost: €1,452,559.49

Total funding: €1,000,000.00

Course 1 total cost: €371,045.20

Course 1 total funding: €210,286.96

Course 1 staff:

- **Scientific responsible: Salvatore Mazzola**
- **Coordinator: Antonino Adamo**
- **Tutor: Arianna Falco**

Table 4

Course 1: Training Activities

Due to logistics and accommodation reasons, the initial part of the Course (lectures) was held in Castelvetro-Selinunte: however, on the first day, after their arrival, the participants were welcomed in Capo Granitola where the programme coordinator and the Institute responsible organized a “kick off” meeting, explained the main activities carried out at the Institute and formally introduced Course 1. After that, a brief meeting was held in order to point out the following steps necessary for the regularisation of the participants’ stay in Italy.

The first month was dedicated to face-to-face lectures held by selected teachers and Institute employees which covered a wide range of topics. More specifically, the subjects were:

- Geographical Political Economy (18 hours)
- Marine and Fisheries Economy (18 hours)
- Maritime Policies and International Maritime Law (18 hours)
- Corporate management and Euro-project management (12 hours)
- Technological Transfer (12 hours)

- Public Relations (12 hours)
- Interdisciplinary Oceanography (30 hours)

After the first month, the 4-month long “training on the job” period started: upon evaluation of the professional/academic background, as well as of the personal scientific interests and IAMC-CNR competences, scholarship holders chose among the IAMC-CNR Detached Units where they spent their training on the job period. Some of the Units involved are located in Sicily (Mazara del Vallo, Capo Granitola, Castellammare del Golfo and Messina), while other Units are located elsewhere in Italy (Naples, Taranto and Oristano). However, one of the participants did his training on the job at the Italian National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development - Unit for Environment and Energy Modelling (ENEA-UTMEA), in Rome.

Two of the participants, on the other hand, spent the last month of the programme (October 2014) as interns at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in Rome.

During the training on the job, the participants had the opportunity to train in laboratory activities, working side by side with the IAMC-CNR staff. During the course, IAMC-CNR’s areas of interest were shown and an expert helped them to choose which training path was more suitable for them.

Participants were also given the chance to spend a couple of weeks on board CNR’s “Urania” Research Vessel, during oceanographic surveys in the Mediterranean and Tyrrhenian Sea. Due to limited availability, in order to select the best suited candidates, Course 1 Coordinator asked the participants to write a cover letter explaining why they wanted to experience the oceanographic survey and how this would have allowed them to gain knowledge: four participants out of six were chosen for the URANIA-BANSIC 2014 Oceanographic Survey. The first leg left at the end of July and lasted 10 days, the second one left soon after and lasted 10 days as well.

The educational path of the Programme also included a monitoring and evaluation phase. During the training on the job, participants studied some literature about the topics and activities carried out in the laboratories and, especially when the Institute closed for summer holidays, the scholarship holders were asked to write a mid-term report about their work in the Units. Moreover, a web platform for a midterm test was set up in order to let the participants take the exam on the topics studied during the first month of face-to-face lectures. The test aim was to evaluate participants’ knowledge about the DIPLOMAzia Course 1 subjects and to do so they had to complete a 21 question test (3 questions for each lesson modules taken in previous

lectures). In order to pass the test, participants had to score 85% of correct answers and they all made it.

As for the midterm report, participants were asked to complete it with the final results achieved at the end of their training on the job period and to discuss it during the closing conference of the Programme held at Capo Granitola's IAMC-CNR, on the 3rd of November 2014.

On the basis of participants' tutors evaluations, on the following criteria *regular attendance and interest in participating to the Course, level of training gained and learning of new theoretical and practical knowledge, from arrival*, each and every one of the scholarship holders received a Certificate of Attendance stating how she/he had successfully completed the course and the final examination. Also, a DVD containing all the main information on DIPLOMAzia Course 1, such as details about the participants, their professional path during the 6 month programme, pictures and much more was given to participants at the end of the last day.

#	SURNAME and Name	ToJ destination	Laboratory
1	SHALTOUT Mohamed	ENEA-UTMEA, Rome	Lab. of Physical Oceanography
2	BAKIU Rigers	IAMC-CNR, Mazara del Vallo	Biol. Oceanography Lab.
3	IBRAHEM Wael	IAMC-CNR, Capo Granitola	Geochemistry Lab.
4	ABOUELFALDL Khaled	IAMC-CNR, Mazara del Vallo	Biol. Oceanography Lab.
5	ABD-ELAAL Ali	ISSM-CNR, Palermo	Lab. of photocatalytic process innovation
6	KECI Erjola	IAMC-CNR, Castellammare del Golfo - in collaboration with the University of Palermo	Lab. of Marine Ecology
7	ALY Walid	IAMC-CNR, Mazara del Vallo	Biol. Oceanography Lab.
8	AHMED Mohamed	IAMC-CNR, Messina	Aquaculture Lab.
9	AHMED Ayman	IAMC-CNR, Mazara del Vallo	Biol. Oceanography Lab.
10	TACHICART Houssam	IAMC-CNR, Mazara del Vallo	Biol. Oceanography Lab.
11	REDA Rasha	IAMC-CNR, Messina	Aquaculture Lab.
12	DUROVIC Mirjana	IAMC-CNR, Capo Granitola	Molecular Biology Lab.
13	HASSAAN Mohamed	IAMC-CNR, Capo Granitola	Geochemistry Lab.
14	ABDEL TAWAB Marwa	IAMC-CNR, Messina	Aquaculture Lab.
15	GHONIMY Abdallah	IAMC-CNR, Messina	Aquaculture Lab.

Table 5

Course 1: Final Assessment



As previously stated, although the IAMC-CNR already had a sound experience in organising training course, DIPLOMAzia was a genuine pilot-project: as an *ad hoc* initiative comprising not only scientific and training aspects, but also logistics (trips to Italy, transfers, etc.), legal (residence permit, insurances, bank accounts, etc.) and sometimes religious and cultural, it implied a strong effort from the IAMC-CNR staff to provide both training and different-related issues. Logistics aspects, within the DIPLOMAzia Programme, were very important, as the CNR-DGCS requested the involved Institutes to provide fellows with full assistance and help, especially during the initial part of their stay in Italy and for the fulfilment of bureaucratic activities. As a consequence, considering also the need to provide assistance as quickly as possible and to kick-off the course, the IAMC-CNR decided to outsource assistance activities, namely first accommodation in Castelvetro-Selinunte, transfers to/from Capo Granitola and bureaucratic aspects (permit of stay, health insurance, bank account opening, fiscal code issue, etc.) to Servimpresa Srl., a local firm that provides technical assistance to training courses.

In line with the training projects previously carried out, project staff decided to provide a limited amount of traditional lectures (120 hours), while giving more space to training on the job - learning by doing activities (720 hours), that is to say working side by side with researchers within labs. Considering that students already had scientific-related university degrees, and that the CNR is a research-devoted rather than education-devoted public body, this kind of training is best suited to a research institute. Then, the Scientific Responsible and the Coordinator decided to outsource to external personnel some teachings comprising maritime law, marine spatial planning, fisheries economy, as these sub-areas do not strictly represent the research areas covered by the Institute staff.

Internships (approximately 100 hours) and the oceanographic surveys onboard "Urania" Research Vessel were complementary activities. In particular, oceanographic cruise was strongly suggested to those fellows whose area of expertise comprised biological oceanography, as these surveys represent one of the main research activities the Institute has been carrying out over the past decades.

Having said that, this project report aims at introducing the main results, finding out some "Best practices" and drawing some "Lessons to be learned" in view of future similar activities.

At first, the dramatic failure in the number of awarded fellows (16) out of selected fellows should be properly analysed: we believe that the loss of motivation from the students and the amount of the scholarship, alongside with the occurrence of contingent problems, greatly explain the high number of refusals. Perhaps, the location of the IAMC-CNR (somehow isolated, in the South-West of Sicily, compared to the locations of the other CNR Structures involved) further discouraged some selected fellows who probably hoped for easier connections to central and northern Italy.

Then, as for Course 1 satisfaction, it emerged from the final questionnaire that almost all students' expectations were met, as far as training offer, work experience career opportunities are concerned.

The 120 hour-long lectures were held by both young and senior professional recruited by Servimpresa and IAMC-CNR: lectures topics were novel for the fellows, whose area of expertise was natural science, engineering, etc., but they found them very useful in view of a more comprehensive training offer. Then, the process of selecting the Training on the Job (ToJ) laboratories of destination involved both fellows and the Institute staff: high priority was given to the IAMC-CNR Detached Units in Sicily and outside, but three fellows were also able to choose partner CNR and non-CNR Institutes, on the basis of fellows' personal interest. Finally, the 10 day-long oceanographic cruise, joined by four fellows only, was a very successful experience for the students whose research experiences at sea had not exceeded a couple of days until that moment.

The perception of a wholly positive experience is also witnessed by the fact that some students asked for job contracts at the IAMC-CNR at the end of the fellowship. As DIPLOMAzia Programme included follow-up actions, such as the disclosure of new career opportunities, scientific staff exchange, as well as the subscription of framework agreements between the CNR and foreign research institutes, these steps are currently being undertaken: a CNR-sponsored Short Term Mobility (STM) Programme application, with the aim of enabling an Egyptian former fellow to come back to the CNR and carry out research activities in the field of geochemistry, was sent for approval on February 2015. Moreover, a framework agreement with Egypt's National Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries (NIOF) is being drafted at the IAMC-CNR.

Having said that, some positive experiences and successful aspects related to Course 1 implementation and management, which can be replicated as "good practices" in further similar initiatives, can be drawn as follows:

- a. Involvement of the whole Institute in the training project.

Although the project was originally conceived only for the Detached Branch of Capo Granitola, it was later decided to involve the whole IAMC-CNR and its Detached Units. The aim was to ease the burden for Capo Granitola's staff and laboratories that were not suited to harbour 15 fellows at the same time. Then, providing different-related marine science opportunities, within ToJ activities, was an added value for Course 1.

- b. Involvement of other research Institutes (e.g. ENEA, University of Palermo).

Similarly, the aim was to improve the course and provide a more "customer-tailored" training offer: some selected fellows had a scientific expertise not strictly bound to marine environments, so they were able to research on topics more suitable for them.

- c. Assistance and logistics.

Outsourcing to Servimpresa Srl., a private firm, revealed to be effective as initial steps, such as first accommodation arrangements, assistance during bureaucratic activities and the search for further facilities (hotels, the hall for lectures, etc.), could be more easily and quickly provided by a private body. In this way, the Institute was able to focus on training and further core activities.

Likewise good practices, also bottlenecks, constraints and weaknesses should be highlighted in order to be avoided in the future, with the aim to increase the level of training-based international scientific cooperation.

- a. High number of participants for each Institute.

As a pilot-project, DIPLOMAzia involved only a limited number of CNR Structures. In the future, a wider range of involved Institutes will be able to increase the whole quality of training, as foreign fellows will have more scientific macro-areas to choose among.

- b. Geographical distribution.

DIPLOMAzia Programme was limited to Northern Africa, the Middle East and the Balkan Region, even though not all countries from those regions were eligible. Widening the number of participant countries, alongside with a stronger financial support from the DCGS-MAE, could maximise the extent of the Programme,

extending it to further regions where the role of Italian "scientific diplomacy" could be properly enhanced, e.g. Far East, Latin America, etc.

Then, geographical distribution should be revisited by the funding agency, especially in terms of national quotas. In fact, taking into account national quotas, as indicated by the DCGS-MAE, it is difficult when applications from a single country are overwhelming: this was the case of the Egyptian nationals in Course 1, representing the 66% of all fellows.

c. Thematic focus.

Thematic focus should be given more space during the selection procedure, in order to determine a closer matching between fellows' scientific profile and the research opportunities a given Institute or laboratory can offer. This would permit the involved Institute to keep all the fellows during the training path, as they would be able to find out here the topics to research on and the facilities (research infrastructures and instruments) to use. Defining a project work, to be drafted and attached to the application for evaluation could be useful to help finding this matching.

Course 1: Closing remarks

DIPLOMAzia was a unique initiative: as a pilot project, everything has been new both for organisers and participants, especially in terms of project management. This implies that some aspects can be improved in future editions.

However, taking into account what has been said in this project report, we strongly believe that Course 1 fully contributed to DIPLOMAzia's general objective: that is to say, fostering scientific cooperation among Italy, Middle East and the Balkan Region and improving synergies among research institutes.

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